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Speeches and Major Press Releases

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Speeches

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Excerpts of remarks prepared for delivery by Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland before the National Council of La Raza, Albuquerque, N.M., July 23, 1980, at 2:30 p.m. EDT. []

This is an election year and I know what some of you are expecting. You think I'm going to stand here and brag about all the things the administration has done for Hispanic-Americans in the last three and a half years.

Well, I'm not going to do that. Not only do I think that would be patronizing, but I don't believe in bragging about something until the job is done. And the job isn't done. We've got a long way to go.

But that doesn't mean I'm not pleased of what we have done and what we're trying to do. I am.

I'm pleased, most of all, of what President Carter has done to lock into place those commitments to minority rights and opportunities that were won by his predecessors.

And I'm especially pleased that he's gone beyond simply confirming those commitments.

His administration has tapped the talents and the skills of minority members and put them to effective use, and I point to my friend and colleague, Assistant Secretary Alex Mercure, as an example of what I'm talking about.

Within the past month, for instance, still another major leadership responsibility was given to Alex--this time in fuel alcohol and bio-mass energy development. Congress has assigned this role to the Department of Agriculture and has authorized \$600 million to carry out the program.

Now I said I wasn't going to brag about what we've done, because there's still too much to do. But I can give you a progress report, starting off with what our Farmers Home Administration is accomplishing.

This year, for example, we'll be making six times as many farm ownership loans to Hispanics as were made in 1976, along with more farm operating loans.

In the first two quarters of this fiscal year, Farmers Home already has made half again as many farm emergency loans to Hispanics as it made in all of fiscal 1979, and it also topped the 1979 figures for rural housing and rural housing repair loans and grants.

In fiscal 1979, total Farmers Home Administration housing loans and grants to Hispanics were triple what they were in the final year of the last administration.

And I could cite you how many jobs in rural areas were saved or created by Farmers Home business and industrial loans to Hispanic borrowers, and what FmHA community facility loans have meant to all the residents--including Hispanics--of the communities served.

The department has worked very hard to identify segments of disadvantaged communities that needed our help to eliminate a variety of chronic problems. For example, we're particularly proud of having funded the Military Highway Water Corporation which will provide decent drinking water to more than 7,000 households of the colonia of South Texas. Our work with limited resource farmers, particularly with a number of strawberry cooperatives in California, is another source of special pride.

These are just a few examples of how we're targeting efforts to increase benefits to communities of predominant Hispanic background.

Beyond these accomplishments are some others relative to Hispanics that make me proud of the administration I represent.

Take the matter of trade and scientific and technical cooperation between the United States and Mexico, for example. Both are growing to the benefit of each country.

Mexico already is a billion-dollar customer for U.S. farm products, and this fiscal year the figure will reach \$1.6 billion. That's more than double the average of the past five years.

At the same time, the United States is Mexico's largest agricultural customer, buying Mexican coffee, fruits, vegetables and other products worth \$1.2 billion last fiscal year. We expect these imports from Mexico to total \$1.3 billion in the current year, almost 50 percent greater than the 5-year average.

The supply/purchase agreement between the two countries, which was signed last January, is proving beneficial to both, and we're working on a similar agreement for 1981.

Because of the drought, Mexico has purchased much larger quantities of grain, oilseeds and other agricultural commodities than ever before.

Earlier this month, we met with top officials of the U.S. and Mexican railroads to see what could be done to reduce rail congestion at border crossings and to increase the flow of rail cars between Mexico and the U.S.

A team of operating people from the National Railways of Mexico, the U.S. railroads, USDA Inspectors, Customs and Immigration was able to initiate some dramatic improvements in the return of empty cars from Mexico, and I'm pleased to say that many other inspection and documentation problems of a government-to-government nature have recently been resolved.

It has been only because of the fine cooperation of the National Railways of Mexico and the U.S. railroads that we have been able to move as much rail freight between the two countries as we have in the last few months.

Agricultural cooperation between Mexico and the United States goes far beyond trade. For years, with our common border of almost 2,000 miles, we have worked together to control disease and pests of animals and plants, but now joint efforts have been expanded greatly.

Within the past year, we have agreed on an extensive scientific research and exchange program to cover livestock, crops, and agricultural education and training. About 40 joint projects have been developed for work in these areas.

In addition, we plan to establish a U.S.-Mexican working group on agriculture to work not only on cooperation in trade, but also to explore other areas where joint action could be mutually beneficial.

So that's my report. It's not a record of goals achieved, but it is, I think, a record of progress.

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PRESIDENT CARTER ANNOUNCES NEW PROGRAM FOR WEATHERIZING RURAL HOMES AND BUILDINGS

WASHINGTON, July 22--A new financing program for weatherizing homes and other facilities served by rural electric cooperatives was announced at the White House today by President Carter.

The president's announcement was made to rural electric co-op leaders and other agricultural, residential and community leaders at a ceremony beginning phase two of the energy conservation outreach efforts by the president.

Explaining the energy resources conservation program, Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland said it would be "available on a voluntary basis to the rural electric systems. It permits them to delay principal payments on their loans to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Electrification Administration in amounts equal to loans to their consumers for energy conserving measures.

"The plan, patterned in part after conservation programs of the Tennessee Valley Authority, will make low-interest loans available to people served by rural electric cooperatives," Bergland said.

The decision to participate in the program will be made by the board of directors of each local co-op, and each board also sets the rate of interest for the loans (0 to 5 percent). The loan payback period can be up to seven years.

The energy conservation plan will work with a minimum of paperwork, Bergland said, because the program was developed with practical suggestions from rural electric systems nationally and a review by two Congressional committees.

"This is one good example of how the federal government and the people have come up with a workable solution to realize an important national goal-- energy conservation--and demonstrate that it can be done," Bergland said. Authority for the program is provided in section 12 of the Rural Electrification Act which permits the administrator of USDA's Rural Electrification Administration to defer principal

payments on REA loans when economic conditions warrant or to achieve important and strategic national objectives.

REA Administrator Robert W. Feragen said the new loan program can provide a truly significant contribution to the president's goal of energy conservation at the same time it serves individual and local interests.

"Participation in the program," he said, "will also have the very positive effect of generating greater consumer interest and involvement in the affairs and objectives of the local rural electric systems."

A packet of information providing details of the program for the 934 REA-financed electric systems has been mailed.

Provisions of the program include:

- Loans can be made to both owners and renters of structures receiving electric service from the rural electric systems.

- Loans cannot be made to refinance earlier conservation obligations or structures to be built or under construction

- Loans may be provided for materials and labor for caulking weatherstripping insulation for ceilings, walls floors duct pipes and water heaters, storm or thermal windows and doors, flock thermostats and attic ventilation fans. If the consumer installs the materials, the loan will be limited to financing the materials

- Loans will be limited to \$3,000 for single family dwellings \$4,000 for structures with two through four residential units, and \$1,000 per unit for larger family multi-family structures.

- Loans in excess of \$5,000 must be approved by a credit committee composed of at least three directors of the cooperative who will determine adequate security for these larger loans.

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245 BERGLAND CALLS ON FARM ORGANIZATIONS TO EXPAND ENERGY CONSERVATION EFFORTS

WASHINGTON, July 22-Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland] today called on agricultural organizations to help expand energy conservation programs to farmers and other rural Americans.

Speaking at a White House ceremony launching the second phase of the President's energy conservation outreach program, Bergland said, "Energy in fuel, fertilizer and ag chemicals is the largest single production cost facing farmers today. It is almost one-fifth of each farmer's expenses."

"This fact alone has encouraged farmers and other rural Americans to pioneer the development and adoption of energy conservation practices. We want to build on that excellent record of achievement in this effort initiated by President Carter," Bergland said.

Bergland outlined a program to ask farm and rural organizations to make a special effort to encourage farmers to adopt new energy saving ideas that will help reduce their individual energy consumption by 5 percent.

"While this reduction seems small, it is extremely important. It has the potential of reducing farmers' expenses by \$425 million in a single year. Notwithstanding the drought, which is extremely serious, energy conservation must be a priority consideration in agriculture today," the secretary said.

Bergland told the agricultural leaders that many programs will be used to promote energy conservation and alternative energy sources for farmers. These include the \$525 million in funds to the Department of Agriculture under the President's Energy Security Act to finance alternative energy development, the beginning of a new program to permit rural electric cooperatives to finance home, building, and business weatherization measures by their consumers, and the development of an agricultural energy information clearinghouse by the Department of Agriculture.

"If we take these steps and continue to work closely together, farmers and all other rural Americans will benefit, and we as a Nation will move much closer to becoming energy self sufficient," Bergland said.

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PUBLIC COMMENT SOUGHT ON DAIRY PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, July 23--The public has until Aug. 18 to comment on the level of price support for milk for the 1980-81 marketing year which begins Oct. 1, said Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Jim Williams. Williams said USDA also is asking for public comment on the prices and terms of purchase by Commodity Credit Corporation of butter cheese and nonfat dry milk.

Current law requires the milk price support be established at between 80 and 90 percent of parity on Oct. 1 each year. USDA officials estimate the minimum level of support (80 percent of parity) will be \$12.73 per hundredweight on Oct. 1 for milk of 3.5 percent butterfat content. This would be an increase of 66 cents over the support price which became effective April 1. It could result in a 5 to 6 cent-per-gallon increase in milk prices at the retail level.

Other matters pertaining to the milk support program on which USDA may make decisions and on which the public may comment are: the manufacturing margins used in calculating the purchase prices of cheese, butter and nonfat dry milk; the allocation of any change in the support price for milk affecting the purchase prices set for butter and nonfat dry milk; and the level of the sales prices of CCC-owned dairy products.

Comments must be in writing and recieved no later than Aug. 18 by the director, procurement and sales division, room 5741 South building, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, P.O. Box 2415, Washington, D.C., 20013.

The comments will be available for public inspection during regular business hours. Copies of the impact statement and the backgrounder also are available upon request.

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USDA REPORTS DAILY EXPORT SALES ACTIVITY

WASHINGTON, July 23--Private exporters today reported to the U.S. Department of Agriculture:

-- export sales of 100,000 metric tons of corn for shipment to the USSR during the 1980-81 marketing year which ends Sept. 30, 1981, and

-- export sales of 100,000 tons of wheat for shipment to the USSR during the 1980-81 marketing year which ends May 31, 1981.

These are the first sales for the fifth year of the U.S.-USSR Grain Supply Agreement (Oct. 1, 1980 - Sept. 30, 1981), and are within the announced policy of permitting purchases by the USSR of up to 8 million tons during that year.

For the fourth year of the agreement, sales and exports totaled 7,939,300 tons (2,171,00 tons of wheat and 5,767,900 tons of corn). Reported exports of commodities not covered by the agreement for the 1979-80 marketing year were 182,700 tons of barley, 806,500 tons of soybeans, 40,700 tons of soybean oil and 11,600 tons of rice.

In addition, exports of 39,900 pieces of cattle hides have been reported since May 12, 1980, when reporting began.

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245 USDA PLANS STRATEGY TO AID DROUGHT-STRICKEN U.S. FARMERS [1-2] 2

WASHINGTON, July 25-[✓]Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Jim Williams said today the U.S. Department of Agriculture stands ready to aid farmers who live in heat and drought-stricken areas and qualify for federal assistance.

Williams said federal officials are "extremely concerned" about the potential effects of the heat wave on crops and livestock and is continuing to assess the situation. However, he said drought assistance programs --principally emergency livestock feed, natural disaster payments and economic emergency loans--are already in operation and being applied when and wherever needed.

Livestock owners whose normal feed production is cut at least 40 percent may receive financial assistance through the emergency livestock feed program of up to half the cost of the additional feed they must buy. Farmers in more than 420 counties whose county agricultural conservation and stabilization committees determined that disaster conditions existed in their areas are now receiving this aid. Producers may contact their local USDA Agricultural Stabilization Conservation Service (ASCS) office to learn how and if they may apply for such assistance.

Wheat, rice, feed grain and cotton producers suffering abnormally low yield may contact their ASCS office for disaster assistance information. County ASC committees are responsible for determining the extent of damage and amount of payment.

USDA also makes emergency loans at 5 percent interest through its Farmer Administration to farmers whose production has been cut by at least 20 percent in an area declared a natural disaster area and to those who cannot obtain credit else. These loans already have been made to more than 320 drought-affected counties. FmHA state directors may determine additional counties eligible for this aid.

Williams said USDA is cooperating with the Federal Emergency Management agency, designated by President Carter to coordinate

federal assistance in the affected regions. The department is also preparing a comprehensive assessment of the impact recent weather has had on crops and livestock and compiling a listing of commitments made under on-going programs, Williams said. This report will be made available in the next few days and will be updated on a regular basis.

The latest cause of the drought and high temperatures was a high pressure system which expanded in the past three weeks from the southwest across the Great Plains into the southeastern states. However, rain and falling temperatures last weekend brought relief to many hard-hit areas. Rainfall was below normal for several months in Northern Plains and spring planted crop yields have been seriously reduced.

Williams said, "The 10-day forecast calls for near to above-normal rainfall and above normal temperatures in major corn-producing states. In the next few weeks, USDA will closely watch the effect of the weather on soil moisture supplies, which are critical to corn and soybeans as they enter their reproduction period."

